MARKETING BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS REQUIRES DIFFERENT TALK

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On a recent visit to Cypress Gardens, one of central Florida's major tourist attractions, I witnessed the results of some of the finest operant conditioning with macaws, Amazon parrots, and African greys I've ever seen. These birds mimicked the human voice perfectly and rode miniature bicycles, and one even drove a toy-sized motor boat across a small pond, hopped out, and eagerly hoisted an American flag, to the thunderous applause of several hundred dazzled children and adults. At the close of the demonstration the trainer offered this talk to the audience: "Some of you may be wondering how we get these animals to perform. The procedure we use is called 'affection training' and involves absolutely no punishment of the animals whatsoever." Afterwards I asked the trainer why she didn't tell the audience she used operant conditioning, because this is clearly what was involved. Without a moment's hesitation she responded, "Oh, well, we don't want to confuse the audience and complicate matters."

Aubrey Daniels, president of a large behaviorally oriented consulting firm in Atlanta, described his initial forays into business in the early 1970s when he was developing the technology of improving productivity in the workplace. "I started off telling managers and supervisors how we could use 'behavior management' procedures to solve their problems. I was quickly informed, 'We don't have *behavior* problems, we have *performance* problems.' " Soon thereafter, he changed his terminology and business picked up immediately. "We started calling what we did 'performance management' and suddenly everyone was clamoring for our help," he reported with obvious delight (Daniels, personal communication, 1989).

I'm sure the exotic bird trainer had never even heard of operant conditioning, probably didn't know that there was a person named B. F. Skinner who developed the science of behavior, and certainly never read an article in the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* (*JABA*) or the *Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior*. Even if she had, she was not going to admit to the audience that any kind of "conditioning" was used with her precocious feathered friends. The technology of operant conditioning apparently does not sound very pleasing to the uninitiated ear when used to describe how we train and motivate parrots *or* people. We obviously need an alternative language for communicating to our lay audiences, preferably something catchy and nonthreatening but something we can live with.

In my view, the problem with behavior analysis is not that we are too technological but rather that we have not realized that we are ultimately in the business of developing a "consumable" product that must be "user friendly" (in computer talk). Behavior analysis was meant to be used by citizens of every type. Parents, children, teachers, students, administrators, supervisors, employees—everyone would be better off if they understood the basic principles of behavioral science and were able to use these principles every day to improve their quality of life and that of those around them.

In the beginning, many of us thought the science of human behavior would eventually yield a behavioral technology that would naturally be well received and automatically adopted by hordes of consumers looking for solutions to nagging problems in education, rehabilitation, child rearing, medicine, safety, criminology, government, business, and industry. We thought teachers, for example, wanting to solve the Number 1 problem in education—discipline—would spontaneously adopt our technology for managing disruptive be-

havior in their classrooms, given the availability and demonstrated effectiveness of behavioral technology. However, it seems that behavioral science and technology have been almost universally ignored by teachers in this country (except in special education, where there is some grudging acceptance, and in Kingsport, Tennessee, where some Kodak engineers have had remarkable success getting teachers *and* students to use "performance management" in their classrooms [Dingus, personal communication, 1991]).

Where have we gone wrong? I believe we miscalculated in two major areas. First, we did not do the front-end analysis with potential consumers to discover exactly what they were looking for, what form it should take, how it should be packaged and delivered, and so forth. Teachers often admit and complain loudly that many of their students are out of control, and they claim they are literally unable to teach because they have to spend so much time trying to keep the children from wrecking their classrooms. I believe they do want solutions, but what they are looking for is something quite magical, an *easy* solution—a "quick fix." They want a few choice words to say to a child who is being aggressive that will immediately calm him down and set him straight. What they don't want is a technology of behavioral evaluation and change ("Let's start by taking a baseline.") that they don't have the time and skills to implement. Teachers also don't want to change the way they run their classrooms (often haphazardly, with a curriculum that is perceived as irrelevant by significant numbers of children), and they don't want any input that suggests they may be doing something wrong.

I don't believe I'm just being cynical. I've worked with teachers off and on for the past 20 years and know them well. Teachers, in my experience, won't buy into a seemingly mechanistic and deterministic technology of behavior change. This is foreign to them and inconsistent with the rest of their training. Teachers are trained a lot like nurses. Their primary goal is to "meet the needs" of the children, and they are convinced that if they do so they will have no behavior problems. Having problems means

they are not meeting some intrinsic need; therefore, they must work harder and dig a little deeper. The kind of psychology they are looking for involves "understanding" children, not "managing" them.

Anyone who has been involved in behavior analysis knows that changing behavior requires consistency and that those practitioners who can't be consistent will fail miserably. What if a large number of teachers were simply not able to be as consistent as necessary? Behavior analysis also requires the teacher to be able to hold the line when it comes to the delivery of consequences ("Those who have completed their work may go on out to recess, those who haven't must stay until they have finished."). What if teachers found it uncomfortable to withhold reinforcers? Any technology needs to suit the consumer, to meet their requirements. Auto safety engineers know that most drivers do not have the swift reflexes or emergency handling skills necessary to avoid injury in a collision, so they have accepted the challenge to design cars that are "safe at any speed." We have not even begun to address this issue when it comes to behavioral technology, and most of us would not know where to begin. In business, marketing "focus groups" are often used to find out about the characteristics of consumers before new products are developed. Carefully selected consumers are presented with a series of questions about new products, how they would use them, how much they would be willing to pay, and so on. I believe we could learn a great deal from our colleagues in marketing to help us advance the acceptability, usability, and social validity of behavior analysis, both experimental and applied.

A related issue is how the final product should be packaged. In our zeal to be scientific, we have stressed the need to match the requirements of science in our writing and publishing. Although this has given us much-needed academic credibility (faculty can be promoted and tenured by publishing in *JABA*) it doesn't help at all in selling our technology to the masses. In other technological fields (e.g., drug development, electronic communications) there is a research and development section as well as a commercial side. There is a well-de-

veloped science of biochemistry, a technology of pharmacy, and the selling of the final product (marketing, advertising, production, and distribution). We have a great science (the experimental analysis of behavior) and a pretty good technology (applied behavior analysis) but virtually no product development or marketing (the Center for Entrepreneurial Studies at West Virginia University is a lone exception).

Teachers wanting a solution to behavior problems in their classrooms have to go to the library, find our journal, and attempt to make sense out of a *JABA* article written in technical language for and by behavior analysts. We have virtually no commercial products available for consumers (in this case, teachers). We do not value marketing, because it does not meet our standards for science. Other consumer-oriented professionals have jumped in with their more acceptable jargon and marketing knowhow. "Positive discipline," for example, is a widely adopted philosophy and technology for teachers (polished speakers, day-long workshops, easy-to-follow, popularly written workbooks, ready-made observation forms, colorful easy-to-use materials) that is somewhat behavioral but is clearly not based on any data that behavior analysts would appreciate or accept.

This latter point suggests an important related issue—the jargon of our field. Our critics feel that we are obsessed with controlling others and have no respect for their freedom or dignity. When it comes to how we talk about what we do, I believe they are right. The people we work with are often referred to as "subjects." We run "control" conditions. We "intervene" whenever we feel like it. We "manipulate" independent variables. Somehow we neglected to develop socially acceptable terminology for presenting our concepts to consumers. If the way we talk about what we do has any influence over our behavior, we could easily treat people in a cold, calculating, and manipulative manner without even realizing it.

I am concerned that we have, in our zest for science and technology, taken the human concerns out of behavior analysis. We have the technology,

but where is the value system to accompany it? Returning to the classroom example for a moment, why do we want to change a given child's behavior in the classroom? For many behavior analysts, the answer sounds like the refrain of the committed mountaineer when asked why he or she wants to climb a forbidding and dangerous peak: "Because it's there." I think we need a better reason for changing behavior, and we need to voice it loud and clear, and often.

When trying to get our technology adopted we need to address the relevant audiences and proclaim that we are promoting the value to the person and to the culture for the particular behavior-change endeavor. We need to stress not the demonstrated relationship between behavior and consequences but rather how the student can become more independent, mature, and self-confident as a result of using our technology. Rather than bringing up the cause–effect relationship, we need to stress how behavioral procedures teach individual and group responsibility, build self-esteem, and encourage respect for others (peers and teachers). Instead of trying to sell determinism (e.g., "We *can* control children in the classroom."), we need to promote the view that behavioral technology gives children dignity and cultivates their freedom.

One reason we have not seen widespread adoption of behavioral technology is that we have not properly analyzed the needs of our potential consumers, and we have not marketed and packaged our product in such a way that it is readily accepted and easily used. Actually, we could use a consensus conference to address these issues (i.e., value systems associated with behavior analysis, ways to promote the positive side effects of the use of reinforcement, developing a public relations strategy for the 1990s, etc.), and we also need a great deal of research on the marketing of behavior analysis.

Behavior analysis offers the solution (probably the only solution) to many of the pressing problems of the day. We are never going to sell our approach to our society as long as we stress the control of human behavior. We must instead begin focusing on important values held by all behavior analysts

and point out how behavioral technology can be used to promote those values. We need to learn more about the needs of our potential consumers and be prepared to adapt our technology to suit them. Technological talk limits us by often putting us off from the audience we need to address. It is time we faced this problem head on. Maybe we need to use a little "affection training" on ourselves.